United Nations E/CN.6/2010/NGO/14

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
10 December 2009

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fourth session
1-12 March 2010
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by Education International, International Trade Union Confederation and Public Services International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2010/1

09-64376 (E) 221209

Please recycle

Statement

Women in the global economy in a time of crisis

Introduction: Impact of multiple crises on women

1. The fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2010 provides an invaluable opportunity to assess progress made and remaining challenges in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 15 years after its adoption in 1995. For the global trade union movement, which will be represented at the Commission on the Status of Women by Education International (EI), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and Public Services International (PSI), there is hardly cause for celebration. We express our deep concern at the plight of millions of working women caught up in a set of global and multiple crises that are not of their making but nevertheless affect their chances to live decent lives in dignity, equity and freedom from poverty. After being hit by the food and energy crises in the second quarter of 2008, they suffered the impacts of the financial crisis which peaked in September 2008, precipitating a veritable employment crisis. In addition, the ongoing climate crisis is slowly taking its toll.

2. These multiple food, financial, employment and climate crises have wiped out a good portion of the gains made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and have had disproportionately negative effects on women, increasing their poverty and food insecurity and limiting their access to decent jobs, affordable, quality education, health and reproductive services, water and other basic social services. These crises have also clearly undermined national policies aimed at reducing gender inequalities and equities.

The employment, food and climate dimensions of the crisis

3. Despite some recent assertions by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that the worst of the crisis will soon be over and despite forecasts of a pick-up in the growth of the global economy, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has estimated that worldwide unemployment will rise by 50 million by the end of 2009, bringing total global unemployment to the highest level ever on record. The number of working poor, those earning less than $2 a day, will rise to 200 million. Given the structured and multiple discriminations faced by women as workers in precarious, lower-paid, underpaid, atypical jobs which they combine with caregiving roles, the employment crisis is affecting them disproportionately. With the shrinking of public sector budgets as a result of the crisis, they are left to shoulder an even greater burden of household care and social provisioning activities, without income or social compensation.

4. The export-led model of growth prescribed by the international financial institutions for the developing countries has resulted in the dismantling of the domestic food-producing sector in many countries and, coupled with speculation in food and other commodities, has led to food scarcity and rising prices for staple food items. Climate change and increasing drought have further worsened food insecurity and water scarcity, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. These factors have had severe impacts on rural food producers, the majority of whom are women, and have affected their capacity to feed their families. Levels of malnutrition in low-income countries have risen dramatically, prompting the United Nations

Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme to step up their food relief programmes in poor and vulnerable communities. The estimated number of the hungry has risen to 1 billion, the majority of those affected being women and children. A total of 1.3 billion people lack access to basic health-care services, while 100 million people are driven into poverty every year by health-care costs.

Globalization and women's employment

5. Globalization has no doubt opened up new opportunities for women's employment, both in the manufacturing and services sectors, yet, women still have difficulty accessing employment, compensation and job mobility opportunities commensurate with their educational and skills levels. Gender plays a critical role in determining the value of work and the pay of women workers in the global health workforce and other social sectors. Historically, gender-based pay inequities are based on the notion that a woman's primary role is home-based, namely, caring for her family and tending to household chores. Women's roles in the workplace are thus seen as an extension of their roles in the home and pay structures are often determined accordingly. Pay inequity therefore remains a persistent problem for working women. No country in the world has achieved pay equity, defined as equal pay for equal work or work of equal value. The pay gap in some industrialized countries, such as the Nordic countries, is now 12 per cent, but in many countries it can be upwards of 50 per cent.

6. Working women are at the lowest end of global value chains, gaining little value added for home-based work, such as making carpets, garments and beady cigarettes. Export-led growth and export processing zones have become an important tool for development growth, with mixed results in terms of impacts on young women, who make up the majority of the workforce. Young women often work under sweat shop conditions and are victims of sexual harassment. Their basic right to join unions and benefit from the workers' protection guaranteed by collective agreements is denied. In many developing countries, a majority of working women (over 70 per cent), are employed in the informal economy as self-employed rural producers, urban retailers in markets or street vendors. Their wages and work conditions are precarious. The informal sector often is not covered by national labour legislation and women working in this sector are denied their basic workers' rights.

7. Unpaid care work is a major contributing factor to gender inequality and women's poverty. In many African countries, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has increased and intensified women's unpaid care work and further reduced their chances of securing paid, productive work.

Investing in education as a human right

8. Investing in education as a human right is key to restored growth and sustainable development. The acute shortage of qualified and trained teachers, especially in the developing world, must be overcome. Given increasing enrolment levels, about 2.4 million teachers (1.2 million new teacher posts) will be needed between 2007 and 2015 in sub-Saharan Africa alone, to achieve universal primary education. The achievement of quality public education is challenged by a number of factors: lack of training and professional development, growing recruitment on a contractual basis, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, increasing natural disasters due to

climate change, conflicts resulting in fragility and attacks on teachers, students and educational institutions.

9. Addressing these challenges calls for an integrated approach, with policies that increase access to education for girls and boys from all social backgrounds and enhance inclusion and quality at all levels and in all settings. Policies must build on a platform of investing in equity in education that combines large-scale recruitment with appropriate pre-service education and ongoing in-service training for teachers. It must include strong and effective leadership in schools, proper working conditions and relevant curricular and teaching resources that enable committed caring professional teachers to do the job well and must include all children in quality education.

10. Educating girls is the most effective and efficient development tool. Educated girls are able to negotiate having a smaller number of children, who, in turn, are healthier and better educated. Educated women play an increasingly active economic and political role at the local and national levels.

Redressing chronic under-investment in public services

11. Chronic under-investment in public services in both industrialized and developing countries remains a significant barrier to the social and economic emancipation and empowerment of women. Women, especially, rely on the availability of quality public health, social care, childcare, water and energy distribution services. Where States fail to provide adequate public health and care services, the burden falls heavily on women to compensate for their non-availability. Universal access to quality public services is key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

12. Across the world, the public sector is an important employer of women. In many cases, it is the single largest employer of women outside the informal economy. Yet occupational segregation, undervaluation of women's work and the increasingly precarious nature of public sector jobs (through the use of outsourcing, short-term contracts, informal subcontracting and the indiscriminate use of temporary recruitment agencies) are factors inhibiting the true economic empowerment and advancement of women.

Recommendations

13. The dominant neo-liberal economic model of growth through skewed capital accumulation needs to give way to a social model of growth, with shared prosperity through decent work and gender equality at the heart of decent work. This must happen through a process of transformative change. Women must be active agents in this process of change, taking their places at the leadership and decision-making levels in global and national decision-making bodies and in the trade unions.

14. The policy and normative framework for gender equality and women's empowerment is set out in a number of instruments, and these should underpin the policies and programmes aimed at restoring growth, with equity, in global and national economies. The following are of paramount importance in this regard:

(a) The Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

(b) The ILO Global Jobs Pact, adopted by the ninety-[illegible] sion of the International Labour Conference (June 2009), which proposes a [illegible] nensive set of policy measures that countries should adopt to address the [illegible] h a strong focus on employment creation, social protection, social dialogue [illegible] ndamental rights at work, in keeping with the four strategic objectives of [illegible] cent Work Agenda;

(c) The ILO resolution concerning gender equality at [illegible] of decent work, adopted by the ninety-eighth session of the International [illegible] Conference (June 2009), which asserts that international labour standards as [illegible] ary means of promoting gender equality in the world of work, and in that [illegible] mphasizes the importance of the Equal Remuneration Convention, 19[illegible] 100), the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 19[illegible] 111), the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. [illegible] Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), the Part-Time Work[illegible] tion, 1994 (No. 175) and the Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177). In [illegible] economic and social policies must integrate the conventions that create [illegible] rights for gender equality such as the Freedom of Association and Protect[illegible] e Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and the Right to Organ[illegible] Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98);

(d) Governments should further promote ILO Recommen[illegible] lo. 198 on the Employment Relationship and adapt the scope of relevant la[illegible] egulations in order to guarantee effective protection for all workers who pe[illegible] ork in the context of an employment relationship, including those in prev[illegible] r atypical forms of employment. Legislative gaps that leave women and [illegible] hout legal protection and enjoyment of their full human and labour rights s[illegible] identified and eliminated;

(e) Governments must invest significantly in public ed[illegible] today and make it a cornerstone of economic recovery plans;

(f) Governments must invest significantly in public heal[illegible] ocial care, including child and elderly care and public water and energy sy[illegible] s tools for achieving gender equality and mitigating the effects of the global[illegible] c crisis;

(g) It is important that policy-formulation and implemen[illegible] ocesses at the global, national and local levels be developed through s[illegible] logue and multi-stakeholder consultations involving trade unions and [illegible] workers' representatives, to ensure that gender equality and decent work o[illegible] inform all policies and their implementation.